UNIVERSIDAD DE EL SALVADOR FACULTAD DE CIENCIAS Y HUMANIDADES DEPARTAMENTO DE IDIOMAS EXTRANJEROS



TÍTULO:

" VIRTUAL PLATFORMS AND VIRTUAL TOOLS USED FOR TEACHING ENGLISH"

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Abstract

This work deal with the changes in the education system in times of covid 19 pandemic when due to contagion prevention reasons new online methods and strategies for the teaching and learning processes were being implemented gradually in classrooms. The develop of this project shows the way in which teachers and students faced those hasty changes through the trial-error experience. In that expertise, an university online course was developed throughout a semester where making use of the variety of tools and online aids, teachers and students were able to design teaching learning methods enhancing the quality and new online effectiveness of the education of which was beneficial for both, for teachers who gained more expertise and knowledge about on how to teach in virtual environments but also for students mainly, since they learned on how to design virtual education environments which going to be useful when practicing their profession and for those as well who plan to work in other areas where the use of technology is a requirement.

Key words: LMS, CMS, Multimedia, E-Learning and Internet.

1. INTRODUCTION

Technology has changed the way we see the world today, there is a world of possibilities in our hands. Technology is present in each of the activities we perform every day, whether at a personal, business or educational level. The Covid-19 pandemic had a great impact on the educational system around the world, although virtual courses already existed, they were not as popular as they were during the pandemic, since all students and teachers could not attend schools, due to the dangers of contagion of the disease and the mandatory social distancing the possibility of teaching and receiving classes via virtual was created. The educational system of our country was no exception, it had to be at the forefront with technology and the use of different virtual platforms. The authorities of the University of El Salvador were forced to create teaching strategies so that students would not miss their classes, and even for those students who had already graduated and were waiting to complete their degree process. In order to give another possibility to obtain the degree, the authorities of the Foreign Language Department needed to present and design a specialization course so the students could have a better option to get their Bachelor's degree. This is how the pre-specialization course entitled "Administration of Virtual Environments for the Teaching and Learning of Foreign Languages" was created.

In this document we point out some of the contents taught and some activities developed in each of the three modules of this Specialization course.

The first one module was about *the Fundamentals of Online Education and its Applications on the English Language Teaching* specifically, the virtual or online teaching approach and the use of LMS (Learning management System) to set up a virtual classroom with synchronous and asynchronous activities and the use of different platforms for teaching online.

The second one was about *Educational applications for learning a foreign language*. In this module we learned about the theoretical fundamentals and the use of technological tools for teaching-learning a foreign language in a virtual modality. The technological tools that we learned how to use online were: edpuzzle, flipgrid, flippity, liveworksheets, nearpod, padlet, kahoot, classroomscreen, powtoon. The use of all these tools is fundamental at the moment to develop an interactive class.

The third one was about "Design of didactic Material for Virtual Environments." In this module, students learned how to use at least four Web tools for the design of educational material, also students learned how to make: podcasts, online presentations, interactive images, videos, among others. Finally, this report will show the importance for teachers to use different technological tools and platforms taking into account the new online modality in order to make more interactive and integrated classrooms besides that to help the students in their learning process to make it easier and more productive.

2. OBJECTIVES

General

To draw a description of the work done in the three modules of the virtual educational tools of specialization course in the English Major Degree of the University of El Salvador in the year 2022.

Specific

- To compose an essential summary of the theory studied in each module of the course.
- > To describe each one of the activities developed in each module.
- To detail the learnings achieved in each one of the modules of the specialization course

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Impact of COVID-19 on education

The pandemic caused by COVID-19 forced teachers around the world to delve into a new modality to continue teaching, which has presented a challenge that implies an adaptation to technological resources. March 2020 was a turning point for face-to-face education due to the mandate for the total closure of educational centers in El Salvador.

In an article published in April 2020, Constanza Bonsignore explains that according to the Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (lesalc-Unesco), which analyzes the impacts of the pandemic on universities, some 23.4 million Latin American university students and 1.4 million teachers have been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. One of the impacts that is reflected in the case of students who have to adapt to the change from face-to-face classes to virtual classes is that social contact is almost non-existent. This is part of the teaching-learning experience in the training of students. In addition to the fact that the students have not taken the change from face-to-face to virtual mode in a positive way because the contents are not focused on virtual or distance mode, they have wanted to substitute the absence of face-to-face classes.

This modality requires high levels of commitment on the part of the students.

It also requires a discipline that has not been instilled or developed in the vast majority of students. With respect to teachers, she points out that they are suffering great effects on their work and professional lives.

The students of the language department of the University of El Salvador were not the exception and were forced to move to the online modality, so new teaching methods and techniques had to be used, and, at the same time also the way in which students prepared for their degree process, since with the passing of time different degree processes were made available as is today the specialization course which continues to be totally online.

Distance education

Distance education has been evolving little by little since the late 1800s when people used to learn through the correspondence education, which according to Encyclopedia Britannica 2012 (as cited in Kentnor, 2015) defined as "a method of providing education for nonresident students, primarily adults, who receive lessons and exercises through the mail, or some other device, and, upon completion, return them for analysis, criticism, and grading" (p.23).

In addition, radio as educational broadcasting became more reliable than correspondence education not only because it was used extensively in the classroom in the 1900s but also because it was affordable and easy to spread communication to many people at the same time (Kentnor, 2015).

Another way of distance education was through the television which according to Koenig & Hill, 1967 (as cited in Kentnor, 2015) is defined as "a medium which disseminates programs devoted to information, instruction, cultural or public affairs, and entertainment." Thus, this kind of education was the previous phase of the evolution of online education today, provided that both share similarities in their technological design.

Education through the internet is one of the most relevant phases of the evolution of online education and can be defined as a way of education that uses computers and the Internet as means of connection between teachers and students, which, according to (Pavithra, 2018), is defined as "a global system of interconnected computer networks that use the standard Internet protocol suite (TCP/IP) to serve billions of users worldwide" (p.275). It emerged in the late 1980s with the creation of online educational programs at the University of Phoenix, which means that the internet is fundamental for students and teachers who are working with e-learning since the realization of different activities through virtual platforms requires an internet connection for most of the tools integrated in it.

However, it was not until the World Wide Web (Web) was launched in 1991 with which the world of education will take a different direction (Kentnor, 2015). Thus, it is noticeable that from this starting point the educational field has experienced more accelerated changes and generated many advantages in the teaching learning process.

According to (Cai, 2012) the improvement of the pedagogical strategies to develop language skills since Language acquisition depends on student's own constant practice. That is the E-learning Pedagogical Strategy.

For instance, students can improve their listening and speaking skills through the use of online tools such as podcasts and translation tools. Consequently, they can put into practice what they have learned by participating in discussion forums on web sites or sharing opinions through posts in social networks to improve their understanding of foreign languages.

Haythornthwaite et al., (2007) states that there is an evident analogy between technology and living things since computers evolve its features in agreement of its types of capacity, compatibility with new softwares for instance, similar to living beings that change their physical, physiological aspect and lifestyles. Didactic material in virtual education should also be modified and innovated by teachers. To achieve that they need to use creativity on how to produce didactic materials to be adaptable to the environment in a collaborative way. In addition, the relation between technology and learning is reciprocal in those didactic materials focused on the research field for instance.

The variety of didactic material that can be found easily through the use of the search tool "Google" at low cost is one of the advantages of online education. Since teachers and students can get access to the content at anytime from anywhere, they can learn in a personalized way and to their extent.

(Cai,2012) Thus, online education has adopted new features giving change to the students to participate more on the development of the academic contents.

Based on (Liliana, 2010), similar to traditional education, the design of didactic material requires a systematic and organized process to be developed. The first phase in the ADDIE model is to evaluate on how the project can achieve the specific objectives taking into account students' needs and way of learning for example.

In the designing phase, teachers need to plan scripts, methods of evaluations and pilot tests with students in order to continue with the development phase in which strategies such as timelines and choice of contents need to be applied to achieve the expected product. In addition, in the implementation phase, it is required the participation of teachers to prepare the conditions such as the virtual tools, equipment for instance and students' evaluations timely.

Finally, the evaluation phase consists of summative and formative in order to obtain findings to be adjusted and improved. That is, designing didactic materials in virtual education implies a well-organized group work by teachers with support of technology resources in order to obtain qualified learning results.

Learning Management System (LMS)

(Turnbull et al., 1970) defines Learning management systems as "web-based software platforms that provide an interactive online learning environment and automate the administration, organization, delivery, and reporting of educational content and learner outcomes" (p.1).

We are living in a world where technology is omnipresent. Due to the presence of technology the pedagogy of teaching methodology has also undergone a seachange. The phrase "e-Learning" or "Technology in Education" has become the buzzword in every educational environment. The classroom environment, today, is completely different from the traditional classroom. The traditional methods which are mainly based on lecturing and rote learning reduce English language learning to mechanical memorization and miserably fail in developing English language as a skill among the learners. New technologies like Internet, YouTube, Skype, tweeter, blogs, mobile phones, interactive boards and many more have added not only stimulus but also learners' engagement and true interactivity within the classroom.

Based on (Jabar Al-Atabi et al., 2020), E-learning in teaching is "learning utilizing electronic technologies to access educational curriculum outside of a traditional classroom. In most cases, it refers to a course, program or degree delivered completely online. Technology use and inclusion in the language teaching-learning process have recently increased in importance and education has migrated to virtual environments.

Thus, as a need, the e-learning course "Administración de Ambientes Virtuales para la Enseñanza y Aprendizaje de Idiomas Extranjeros" managed to train students about to finish their college degrees in teaching to face all challenges that come with the use of technological tools and resources.

A Learning Management System (LMS) is one e-learning tool that has been widely used to improve students' learning experience and the construction of their under-standing of certain topics. The technologies that facilitate the provision of courses over long distances are broadly termed "learning management systems" or "LMSs." Learning management systems can be defined as web-based software platforms that provide an interactive online learning environment and automate the administration, organization, delivery, and reporting of educational content and learner outcomes. An LMS can be very useful for organizing and presenting digital content. (Learning Management System (LMS) Guide pdf Page 1-2)

> What is the importance of using LMS in teaching learning?

LMS helps monitor students' progress and performance in the course. The teacher can share pdf documents, videos, presentations and quizzes. It has an in-built feature that keeps track of their records, grades, submissions, and engagement with the course.

Likewise, it collates important files and documents shared by the students in the platform.

Many online platforms have tools and features designed specifically for educators. Some examples of LMS are Google Classroom, Edmodo, Schoology, Blackboard, Mooddle.

> Why use virtual tools and multimedia to teach foreign languages?

(Pavithra, 2018) defines multimedia as "the field concerned with the computercontrolled integration of text, graphics, drawings, still and moving images (Video), animation, audio, and any other media where every type of information can be signified, stored, communicated and handled digitally" (p.272).

Using multimedia to teach foreign languages effectively needs to take into account the teacher's experience in the art of designing didactic materials by excluding unnecessary information and placing emphasis on strategic materials that help students to construct their knowledge and according to their level (Eady & Lockyer, 2013).

The more practice and use of virtual tools for learning English language the more motivation awakened by students to explore new ways of organizing their knowledge in just one place. For instance, having created several didactics materials throughout the course, students felt the necessity to find a way of keeping all their virtual didactic materials in just one place, and this one was CMS google site, which according to (Turnbull et al., 1970), CMS are defined as "essentially software applications designed for the creation and management of digital content in a collaborative environment" (pp.1-2).

4. DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITIES

MODULE I: Online English Language Teaching

In module I different topics were developed such as; The fundamentals of online education and its application on English Language Teaching; specifically, the virtual or online teaching approach, like using an LMS (Learning Management System) to set up a virtual classroom and develop asynchronous activities, for instance, Educational platforms and their applications and their use for online asynchronous classes: Google Classroom Moodle; and use platforms like TEAMS or Meet for asynchronous activities. Presentation of educational products: virtual classroom and videos of work sessions in TEAMS or MEET.

The followings are some activities developed in module I:

Discussion forum

Discussion forums can be used for many purposes, such as helping students to inspect material prior to an assignment or exam, engaging students in a discussion of the course material before coming to class, and reflecting on material that they have read or worked with outside of class. In this activity, the students wrote a comparative essay in which they demonstrate the understanding of Theories of Learning in a virtual environment and traditional classrooms when teaching English. After that, students posted their essays in an Academic Forum, where they replied and shared their opinions with other students. This activity promoted participation among them.

≻ Infographic

An infographic is a visual representation of information. Infographics examples include a range of elements such as images, icons, text, charts, and diagrams to convey messages at a glance. Another activity in this module was the creation of an infographic in which students researched information about the LMS (Learning Management System). Having analyzed the information, students must select the four most common LMS, (Blackboard, Canvas, Edmodo, Schoology, Moodle, etc.) and their features and include them in the infographic.

➤ Create a Virtual Classroom



Using Google, students had to create an English course on Google Classroom.

Firstly, students had to select a topic and a macro skill (Listening, Speaking, Writing, reading) or a subskill (Grammar, pronunciation). After that, students had to choose the level of English (basic, intermediate, advanced) and the course, then look for and create material (adding worksheets, PDF files, Videos, audios, PPT, quizzes, assignments) and upload it to Google classroom and prepare a 45 minutes class.

≻ Demo Class

This was the last activity of module I in which students had to prepare a 15 minutes Demo class in groups of three, to develop the class students had to select a Subskill (Grammar, pronunciation, etc.) or micro skill (Listening, Speaking, Writing and Reading) select the topic of the lesson, create a lesson plan, besides that, create a PowerPoint presentation, and use the material and activities uploaded in Google Classroom. To develop the class students used Google meet. During the presentation students were in charge of managing the class. At the end of each presentation, the teacher gave students some feedback to know how the class was developed.

Some of the LMS taught were:

Some of the Learning Management System (LMS)	
Edmodo	Edmodo is an educational website that takes the ideas o a social network and refines them and makes it appropriat for a classroom.
moodle	Moodle is a free software learning management system providing a platform for e-learning and it helps the various educators considerably in conceptualizing the variou courses, course structures and curriculum thus facilitating interaction with online students.

	Schoology A free platform with tools to embed media and	
Schoology	manage online discussions. A collaboration feature allow	
	educators to share materials and integrate public content	
SCHOOLOGY	Assessment tools generate tests, provide direct studer	
	feedback, and track progress.	
	Blackboard A comprehensive online education platform	
DI	that includes a mobile application and real-time	
- 60		
De	collaboration features. Assessment tools include an online	
Blackboard	test generator, interactive rubrics, and built-in reports.	
	Google classroom LMS offered by Google for teachers	
	This application provides a control location to communicate	
	This application provides a central location to communicate	
	with students, ask questions, and make assignments.	
Google Classroom		

MODULE II: Applications for Learning a Foreign Language

The second module of the specialization took place from June 4th -to July 23rd, 2022, time in which different knowledge and usages of different educational applications were taught in order to use them in both: face to face classes and online classes but focusing mainly in virtual environments and students were asked to develop different activities such as:

➤ Infographic: Educational Apps

The goal of an infographic about various applications and tools was to both capture the most crucial aspects and features of some educational programs while also understanding and properly utilizing the parts that an infographic must have in order to be effective.

➢ Flip Video: Educational Apps

The students worked on an educational application called Flip, the purpose was to use it to better understand the use of it and at the same time to be able to talk about two different educational applications and the use that can be given to them in different classrooms.

Powtoon Video: Educational Apps

In this activity we created a video using the educational application called Powtoon in order to learn how to make optimal use of it and learn more about its functions, and at the same time explain other educational applications but this time focused on the use that students could give it, explain its main features and the benefits it could bring to students.

Demonstrative Class: Educational Apps

In this assignment the students prepared a lesson plan and conducted a microteaching lesson using the Educational Tools for learning and teaching a foreign language.

They worked in teams and on the last day of module II the microteaching lessons were delivered and the students supported each other by playing the role of teachers and students.

Some of the Tools taught were:

LIVEWORKSHEETS	It's a website that provides a very basic free tool tha enables you to digitally transform many of the activities you create for your students and make them interactive so they can be completed without difficulty using any electronic devices. Cards in several forms are available for designs.
flippiły	Flippity is a tool that gives us the ability to design unique, stunning, and easy interactive activities for the classroom. It also provides some management tools that will help you save time and engage your students Both students and instructors may use this software and it just requires a few simple steps to use it.
:Padleł	Padlet is a virtual platform that facilitates the construction of collaborative murals. It is possible to create work areas were multimedia materials, such as films, audio, images, or documents, may be shown These materials are attached as sticky notes.

Dogroon 🕥	Nearpod is an app that allows you to make interactive presentations in a pleasant, appealing, and guided manner. It is a presentation platform that aims to incorporate interactive components with the goal o
	involving students and delivering feedback to professors
POWTOON	PowToon is an internet tool that makes it simple and enjoyable to create animations. You don't need to download any software to your computer because it is online. The work you do will be stored in the cloud, so you never have to install anything on your computer.

MODULE III: Design of Didactic Materials for Virtual Environments.

This last module of the course was about how to create, edit and adapt multimedia didactic material for teaching English language which were used to design a web page using google site platform where materials created from the previous modules could be added in order to enrich the experience of working in a virtual environment sharing works from other class groups.

The activities were developed in the following way:

➤ Podcast

The first activity that was developed in module three was "Educational Podcast". A podcast is a type of multimedia file that contains audio content in formats such as mp3, wav, wma, among others. Its content was related to a specific topic of the teaching of English language and its structure is composed of an introduction, a title, the development of the content and a conclusion which needs to be duly outlined in order to convey the message to the audience in an effective way. To achieve the goal of this activity, it was recommended the use of software called "Audacity" which is very versatile not only because of its easy interface and features to use but also because it is very compact and uses less memory space in the ram memory which can be successfully installed in any operating system. The topic of the podcast was chosen in a freeway in agreement of everyone's preference and worked individually. Its duration was between 4 to 6 minutes and uploaded on soundcloud.com to be shared on campus for its evaluation.

≻ Video

The second activity was to create an instructional video of a previous activity done in module one. An interactive video is a type of multimedia file that contains a combination of audio, images and text and its most common file formats can be avi, mkv, wmv and mp4 among others. In this activity, students explained through a brief tutorial on how that activity was created and performed using some softwares such as OBS studio to record screen, audacity to edit audio, powerpoint to edit slides and text and the video editor, "open shot."

This software provides multiple options in a versatile way to design and adapt didactic material for video edition. This video was uploaded on campus and it could be used to create the final activity "google site creation".

➤ Interactive Image

The third activity was to design an interactive image to introduce a new English language topic. An interactive image is a representation of a specific topic through an image as background and over it, different multimedia resources inserted from different websites in order to viewers can knew in general way what that topic is about by doing click over each link of the resource of the image To do this activity we used different tools such as powerpoint to edit images, different websites from where we took created activities from previous modules and the virtual tool "genially", which was used to design and edit the interactive image with the resources mentioned.

➤ Google Site

The final activity was the creation of a website in google. This activity was developed in two sections, the design of the website and the presentation.

The website was divided in three sections such as "About the teacher" where students showed teacher's personal information,

"Schedules" where students posted information of the classes time and a google calendar with the scheduled activities and "Resources" where students added predesigned didactic material throughout the course to each specific unit. And finally, students presented their google site to the class in the last synchronous session of the course.

Some of the tools taught were:

Audacity	Tool used for audio editing to be adapted to the practice of listening to teaching material such as conversations, podcasts, among others.
OpenShot	Tool used for video editing to be adapted to the practice of listening and reading to teaching materia such as conversations, tutorial, movie scenes, etc.
	Tool used to create customized presentations wit animating material such as image, audio, video, text icons among other sources.
	Useful and versatile storage tool for teaching materia necessary to create virtual school environments with which all applications of google such as drive, docs slides, calendar, etc. can be easily linked.

5. ACHIEVEMENTS

The specialization course in the administration of virtual environments for the teaching and learning of foreign languages helped students on how to learn to teach a foreign language using technological virtual tools and its development was done into three modules.

- In module I, "Online English Language Teaching ", students learned about the features and functions of the most recognized LMS such as Moodle, for instance, Schoology and Google classroom which was used to perform the teaching practice.
- In addition, students practiced and improved the use of recommendable softwares to create presentation designs such as Powerpoint and Canva, to be used in class, so they were able to design an academic infographic where the main LMS is seen in the class were represented.
- In the module II, "Applications for Learning a Foreign Language" students learned about several useful virtual applications tools to teach online such as Flippity, Nearpod and Powtoon for example and how to use them to create academic activities on Google Classroom.
- They were able to perform a class managing one virtual tool in each section of the lesson plan.

- They practiced and improved the use of recording a video option of Flipgrid tool since they were able to record a video tutorial explaining the features and how to use two virtual tools, in such a way that each student worked on those tools exploring their options and effects to be presented in the video.
- Students in module III, "Design of Didactic Materials for Virtual Environments" developed the ability to edit multimedia material such as images, audio and video in a more advanced way, since they were able to create a podcast by editing and adapting it for a specific topic in a lesson.
- They also improved the technique of video editing, since they were trained to produce an educational video of a specific topic of English language in which they were able to adapt text, images and audio using the tools and effects of open shot video editor software.
- Finally, students learned about how to create a website in google in which they had the opportunity of incorporating all the design materials to create a virtual library for near future online classes for being with students. They included an interactive image designed in "Genially" platform and a presentation of the course.

6. CONCLUSIONS

- Learning about the different platforms and digital applications gave way to a new environment where teachers can apply and implement each of them to make an online classroom more interactive and interesting for students, which shows that there are no excuses or barriers for language learning to be effective in face-to -face classroom or online.
- Carrying out this project was very beneficial for both, teachers and students, since both of them had an idea of the online tools and platforms for teaching the English language but this project was a door to practice and perfection in the use of such, since it has always been said that technology is important and every day has more importance and even so it was not really taken into account but knowing all its pros and benefits, people take the challenge to try its implementation in classrooms, specifically in online classrooms.
- This course managed to train future teachers who will face new challenges related to technology, which makes them more confident and secure in the use of it; thus, being able to reinforce and provide teaching in the best possible way and showing that online classes are something that teachers can generate pleasant experiences for students, demonstrating that it can be effective and entertaining at the same time.

Finally, this type of course benefits the students completely as it allows them to continue their education in essential areas, since the online applications and tools are not only necessary for online classes but can also be implemented in face-to-face classrooms, which means double gain for all the students who were part of this course.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

For the continuation of future courses about administration of virtual environments for the teaching and learning of foreign languages to support the use and management of virtual tools for teaching the English language in the Department of Languages of the Universidad El Salvador:

- Continue to provide new learning experiences for students and thereby create social impact in a new technological age of learning that can help teachers teach the English language for future generations.
- Provide more technological sources and training to the teachers in charge of the different modules of the course so that they provide even better explanations and information about the different technological tools and applications.
- Continue to offer and innovate this type of specialization courses to support graduates of the English language teaching option with a more effective and interactive teaching method for teaching the English language.

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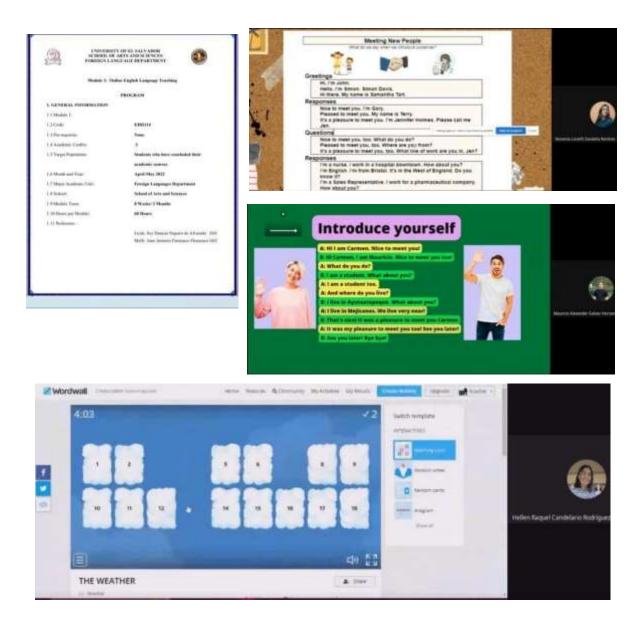
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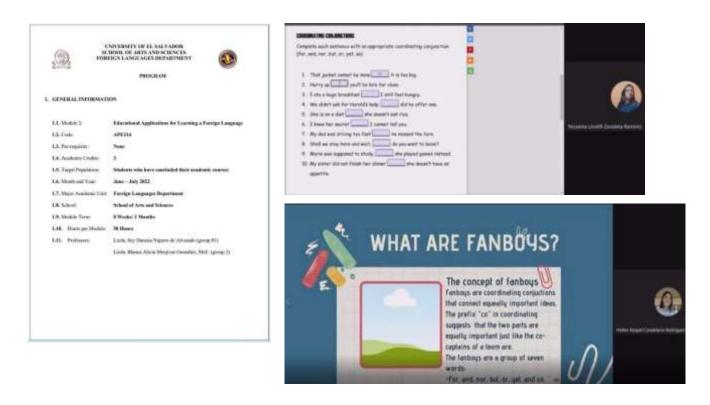
9. ANNEXES

Module I



Images taken from the "Demonstrative Class activity" in module I on May 30th performed by Yessenia Zabaleta, Hellen Candelario & Mauricio Galvez

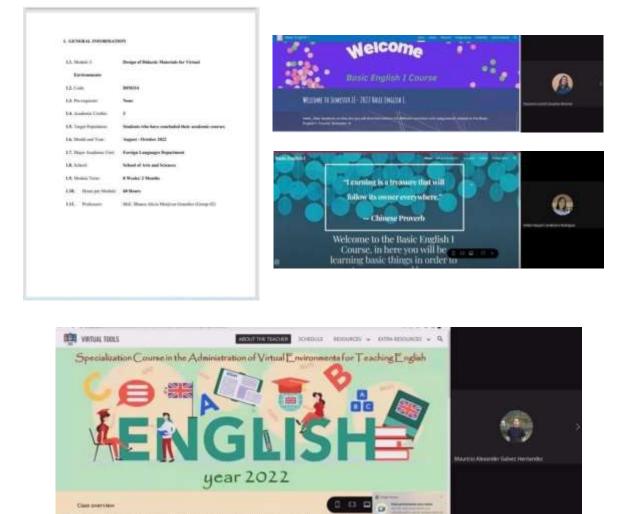
Module II





Images taken from the "demonstrative class activity" in module II on July 23rd performed by Yessenia Zabaleta, Hellen Candelario & Mauricio Galvez

Module III



Images taken from the "Presentation of Google Site activity" in module III on October 1st by Yessenia Zabaleta, Hellen Candelario & Mauricio Galvez